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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the emerging journal-writing skills of 16 monolingual Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans and 10 monolingual English-speaking first-graders in San Diego County, California, in a whole-language, two-way bilingual classroom. The research looked for developmental stages in writing in the primary language, similarities or differences for the second language, the beginning of spontaneous second-language writing, and occurrence and results of social interaction during journal writing. It was found that the children approached the writing task from unique and individual perspectives, combining drawing and writing in early journals, experimenting with alphabetic forms and shapes, writing lists, and repeating patterns of letters, words, and sentences. They used early journals for egocentric writing activities, actively constructing writing schema through manipulation and experimentation. As the year progressed, journals became more audience-oriented as the children interacted with their peers, teachers, and researchers. (MSE)

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Emerging Literacy in a Two-Way Bilingual First Grade Classroom

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EMERGING LITERACY IN A TWO-WAY BILINGUAL FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

As the whole language approach to teaching literacy receives increased emphasis, the effects of whole language instruction on young children's learning requires investigation. This study examines the emerging journal writing skills of sixteen monolingual Spanish-speaking Mexican American and ten monolingual English-speaking first grade students in a whole-language, two-way bilingual first grade classroom. The children in this classroom approached the writing task from unique and individual perspectives. We found that the children combined drawing and writing in their early journals, experimented with alphabetic forms and shapes, wrote lists, repeated patterns of letters, words and sentences. The children were using their early journals for egocentric writing activities, actively constructing writing schema through manipulation and experimentation. As the year progressed, the journals became more audience oriented as the children interacted with peers, teachers and researchers. We hope that classrooms such as the one we are studying will become the norm, where children are allowed to develop interactive literacy skills in a natural and supportive environment.

As the whole language approach to teaching literacy receives increased emphasis, the effects of whole language instruction on young children's learning requires investigation. Especially important is the impact on linguistically diverse children (children whose first language is not English). This paper describes the initial phase of a five-year study designed to examine the emerging writing skills of 26 children who are acquiring English or Spanish as their second language in a two-way bilingual classroom which uses a whole language philosophy.

The disproportionate underachievement of Mexican American and other language-minority students in the United States is well documented (Cummins, 1989). The academic failure of Mexican American students historically has been attributed to their lack of English language proficiency (Cummins, 1989). Although research exists that examines the language patterns of Mexican American and other ethnolinguistically distinct students, these studies have been limited primarily to descriptions of code switching behavior and oral English and Spanish language usage in the classroom.

Few researchers have examined the emerging written academic language skills of linguistically diverse children across languages in nontraditional settings such as the whole language classroom (Y. Goodman, 1986). Studying the emerging literacy of children learning a second language (Spanish and English) may begin to provide a broad picture of patterns of written language

acquisition (Dyson,1985; Edelsky,1986; Hudelson,1989). Dyson (1985) suggests that such study will provide "insight into the complex interrelated variables and the varied paths children take as they develop" (p. 60).

The present study focuses on the paths that children take as their writing emerges. Their daily journal writing forms the data base. The research questions revolve around the emergence of literacy and the effect of being in a whole language classroom where acquisition of a new language is taking place. Specifically, the questions which we raised are the following:

1. Are there stages of development in children's writing in their primary language as they move towards becoming part of a literate community?
2. Do these stages differ for native Spanish speakers as compared to native English speakers?
3. As children begin journal writing in their first language, at what point do they, spontaneously begin writing in their second language?
4. Does social interaction occur among children during journal writing, and does the interaction affect their writing efforts?

The paper will begin with a brief literature review of whole language, dialogue journals and emergent literacy. The study will be described including methodology used and results of the initial phase of the five year project. Future study will follow the same children through the fifth grade.

Literature Review

Whole Language

The term "whole language" has been used so frequently in the literature in recent years, that it has come to mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this paper, whole language is defined as a conceptual framework which emphasizes meaning, integrates language skills, uses authentic materials and respects the learner. Current research suggests that whole language instruction promises to effectively prepare ethnolinguistically distinct students for a technological society. The approach values learners' language, cultural background, and experience. K. Goodman (1986) explains "whole language classrooms respect the learners: who they are, where they come from, how they talk, what they read and what experiences they already have before coming to school" (p. 10). Whole language instruction provides ethnolinguistically distinct students with a context for learning in a purposeful way. It permits them to take an active, problem solving approach to literacy (print) which also builds their own self esteem (Bissex, 1980).

Social interaction is another critical component in children's development. Interaction promotes communication among peers and between students and the teacher, which Dyson (1989) and Graves (1981) have demonstrated is so important in learning to write. The child's interaction with another person, either teacher or more knowledgeable peer, helps the child to master more advanced and complex behaviors through what Vygotsky (1978) called the zone of proximal development. Through interaction with the environment, children discover the

principles that govern their world using experimentation and manipulation as tools (Piaget, 1959).

The classroom environment also is a critical component in children's development in a whole language context. Research on language use of linguistically diverse students in traditional classrooms shows that often the way the classroom is structured (e.g., teaching format, rules of participation, etc.) inhibits the students' participation in the classroom (Au, 1979, 1980; Díaz, Moll, & Mehan, 1986; Philips, 1972). Langer (1986, 1987) contends that language minority children who do not exhibit their knowledge in ways acceptable to mainstream society are often misdiagnosed by their mainstream teachers as not possessing valued knowledge and skills.

All of these components, valuing the student, making learning about something, and the developmental considerations found in social interaction and classroom environment are integral components of a whole language philosophy. Such a philosophy as discussed above provides for classroom settings where learning can take place, particularly for linguistically diverse students.

Emergent Literacy

Virtually all children entering school for the first time have come into contact with print, whether they come from highly literate homes, or homes where reading materials are scarce. Children are exposed to print even as they walk to school. Everyday, children are faced with stop and grocery store signs. They may not be able to read those signs, but they are aware of their existence. They don't begin school without any concept of literacy. This is equally true of children who arrive in schools with little or no past schooling experience, or those who have attended pre-schools. From their previous experiential base, Y. Goodman (1986) suggests that children invent, discover, and actively construct their own schema of written language as they grow up in a literate society.

Current research findings in whole language suggest that children should begin writing as early as kindergarten, even before they can read (Sowers, 1981; Hudelson, 1989; Shanahan, 1988). Children begin to write using what they know about the names of letters in the alphabet and familiar bits of written language in the environment (Farr, 1985). Writing instruction should follow a whole language perspective which emphasizes use of authentic (student chosen) topics for real audiences and authentic texts for reading (Hudelson, 1989). The importance of learning to write at a young age is further supported by recent research showing that children who write well in a language tend to read well in that language and also possess strong oral skills--although the reverse may not be true (Eisterhold Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, & Kuehn, 1990; Kuhlman & De Avila, in press).

An important early stage in writing development is composed of playing with letters and numbers, often before using print for communication. Decorating alphabetic letters is an example of this, as is scribbling on the walls at home. Clay (1975) found that in their earliest writing, young children experimented with language symbols and how they are segmented (e.g. into syllables); decorated and repeated standard alphabetic and numeric forms, and made inventories and lists. During this last stage children appeared to take stock of their own learning by listing or ordering aspects of their knowledge. Graves

(1981) too found that children played with writing as they explored size, shape and the appearance of letters.

Play, as supported in the whole language philosophy, is integral to children's developmental writing. Vygotsky (1978) contended that in play "a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself" (p. 102). In addition, Vygotsky believed that such make-believe play is a major precursor to the development of written language and that "make-believe play, drawing, and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process ..." (p. 102). As writing for communication becomes more important to the child, this focus on playful, self-centered or egocentric writing decreases. The child begins to pay more attention to conventions such as writing in a line, punctuation and spelling.

Aspects of children's emerging writing in addition to play, have been described by a variety of researchers. Ferriero and Teberosky (1982) have suggested five such phases: 1) the interrelationship between drawing and writing; 2) the appearance of alphabet forms; 3) the assignment of sound values to letters, one letter per syllable; 4) the special relationship which begins for the child between text and oral reading of that text, and the use of the properties of text; and 5) the resemblance of conventional writing entering into the child's text.

The patterns mentioned above have been found for both native English speaking children and for those learning English as a second language. Hudelson (1984) claims that the:

> ... written products of ESL children look very much like those of young native speakers learning to write English, exhibiting such features as unconventional invented spelling and letter forms, unconventional segmentation and punctuation, and the use of drawing as well as writing to express ideas (p. 21).

Although similar patterns have been found in children's texts, most researchers conclude that these are not fixed nor necessarily sequential (Dyson, 1986; Graves, 1981). Individual children write for individual purposes and use their journals to resolve individual problems with segmentation, spelling and making meaning. Sulzby (1986) cautions "we do not yet have an exhaustive list of the writing systems used by children, nor a defensible categorization of those that are functionally equivalent" (p.68).

How children's writing (and reading) skills emerge in a natural environment continually will be a source of study. The factors that influence this emergence are many. The present study hopes to add to the body of knowledge in these areas.

Journal Writing

The present study examines one particular event, journal writing, which has received increasing interest over the past decade, particularly in whole language classrooms. Journals provide for authentic writing situations as opposed to artificial writing that occurs in many classrooms. They place the student in control: the child chooses what, how, and how much to write. Edelsky, (1986)

has described authentic writing as that which is done in order to communicate, in other words, for a purpose.

Interactive (or dialogue) journals provide authentic experiences through written communication between the writer and reader, (usually the teacher or peer). When responding to a child's journal, the teacher models various forms of writing as well as correct spelling, grammatical structures and new vocabulary. In this way the child learns through example rather than direct instruction (Kreeft Peyton & Reed, 1990). Interactive journals thus stretch the child's experience, helping to promote Vygotsky's zone of proximal development as discussed earlier (1978).

The first comprehensive study of interactive journals in the classroom setting was described by Staton, et al. (1988) who found that the functional context, cognitive demands, and personalized education of interactive journals allow for learning and growth. Other researchers have had similar positive results using dialogue journals with English as a second language (ESL) students from diverse linguistic populations (Edelsky, 1986; Hudelson, 1989; Kreeft Peyton, 1990; Seda and Abramson, 1990). For example, Flores and Hernández (1988) found such experiences effective with Spanish speaking populations acquiring English because they allowed the children to learn that writing is communication. Journal writing encouraged the children to take risks in their first and second language and to experience ownership of the written product. Such ownership in writing development is an important aspect of journal writing. According to Graves (1981):

> ... when people own a place, they look after it; but when it belongs to someone else they couldn't care less. It's that way with writing. From the first day...we teachers must become totally aware of our awful daily temptation to take control away from them, whether by too much prescription or correction, or even advice. (p.8)

Children's use of journal writing to express themselves, provides children a comfortable place for social interaction with others, a sense of ownership for self, and a way to expand one's experiences with print.

Methodology

Setting

During the 1990-1991 academic year, all of the daily journal writing of 26 first grade children was examined.

The children who took part in this study live in a small semi-rural area of northern San Diego County. The community of 90,000 is composed of primarily lower and middle class residents.

The school follows a four quarter year round model which begins the end of July with 3-4 week breaks in October, December-January, April and July. Approximately 10% of the children attending the school of 1100 are limited English proficient as determined by state approved assessment criteria. These 10% are primarily the offspring of migrant and other farm workers in the area.

The school provides bilingual education for those whose first language is Spanish through the fourth grade, although children may be exited sooner based on various district and school criteria. In addition, each bilingual classroom has at least ten native English speaking children who are acquiring Spanish, resulting in a two-way bilingual program. In the target classroom, the children were divided for primary language instruction in the mornings. The English speakers were sent to another classroom and Spanish speakers from that classroom were sent to Ms. B's (the target teacher) class. In the afternoons, the original 26 students received all instruction in Spanish two days per week and two days in English. The fifth day the children chose the language of instruction. Afternoon instruction included language arts, math, science and P.E.

Sample

The classroom teacher, Ms. B., has a basic and advanced credential in elementary bilingual education as well as a language development specialist certificate and an M.A. in Education (Policy Studies). She has been a bilingual teachers for over ten years. As well, Ms. B is a strong advocate for primary language instruction and teaches from a whole language perspective.

Initially, ten native English speakers (five male and five female) and sixteen native Spanish speaking children (seven male and nine female, all limited English proficient) comprised the sample. All the children were between the ages of 6 and 7. One English speaking boy left the school in October and two Spanish speakers (one boy and one girl) left in the spring. The majority of the children also had attended kindergarten at the same school but had done little organized writing.

Data collection

The children wrote ten minutes per day immediately after lunch, on blank paper in either Spanish or English as they wished, on any topic and in anyway they wished. The teacher also wrote during this period of time. She would sometimes indicate to the children what she was writing to provide them with real examples of how writing was used, e.g. a letter to parents about a field trip or a list for the supply room.

During the first two quarters of the school year (August - December) all the children read their journals aloud to whomever might be in the classroom, parent, aide, teacher, research assistant, or researcher. Once a week the researchers and/or the research assistant observed the students writing and their interactions with other children, kept an observation journal and tape recorded all of the children reading their journals aloud. The tape recordings later were transcribed for comparison with the written journals. Videotapes also were made several times during the spring to enable analysis of the student interactions.

During the last school quarter (May - July), on days when tape recording was not taking place, only volunteers (usually a table of six children) were chosen to read aloud to the class. The teacher, however, had begun responding in writing to each child's work beginning with the second quarter (October). An example of an early teacher response was simply "Pretty letters". An example from later in the school year was "What else do you like to play besides soccer?"

Analysis of Data

Journal analysis followed ethnographic procedures which requires no preconceived notions of how the patterns would emerge. Each child's journal was charted over the four quarters of the school year and similar categories identified. These categories coincided with those of other researchers (e.g. Clay, 1975; Graves, 1981; and Ferriero & Teberosky, 1982). The data were not analyzed for mechanics of writing, e.g. spelling, punctuation or grammar, nor for specific content. Transcriptions of the audio tapes, particularly at the beginning of the school year, often aided in the deciphering of the children's writing and invented spelling. In addition, information from the observation journals and videotaping were examined to identify what social interactions may have affected the children's writing.

Findings

Patterns

Early Journals (August-October). These 26 children entered the first grade with varying prior writing experiences. They approached the writing task from unique and individual perspectives. However, like other researchers (Clay 1975; Ferriero and Taberosky, 1982), we found over the course of the first few weeks several types of entries that appeared repeatedly in the journals. These included drawings; experimentations with forms and shapes; random letters and numbers; letters and numbers in order (and repeated); lists (e.g. colors, names, and rhyming words); and sentences. The children were using their early journals for egocentric (self-centered rather than other centered) writing activities, actively constructing writing schema through manipulation and experimentation. As the year progressed, the journals became more audience oriented as the children interacted with peers, teachers, and the researchers. Four of the patterns the children used most frequently are shown in Figure 1. They include squiggles/drawing; alphabet letters; lists; and sentences.

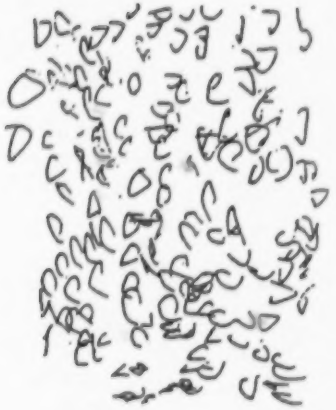
Second quarter journals (October-December). By the new quarter in October, all the children appeared to have internalized a sense that numbers and letters represented different things, and that letters were used in "writer's workshop" (what the teacher called the time for journal writing). In addition, at this time, several children, both Spanish and English speaking, began writing only sentences. This change occurred from the day they returned from their quarter break.

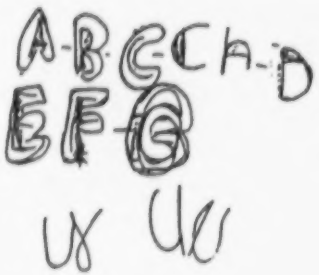
Third and fourth quarter journals (January-June). By the end of the second school quarter in December, no children were making number lists in their journals, and only a few of the Spanish speakers (no English speakers) were still making alphabet lists. Table I shows the progressive stages through which the children moved throughout the year. Differences between Spanish and English speakers can also be seen.

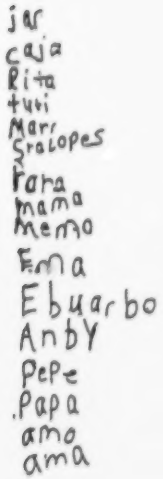
Differences between Spanish and English speakers.

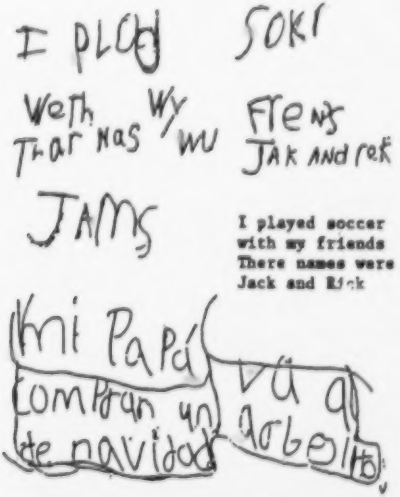
The majority of Spanish speaking children drew or wrote the alphabet and numbers in their journals at first, either randomly or in alphabetic and numerical order, while most of the English speaking children were at the list or sentence

Figure 1: Examples of children's progression from squiggles (upper left), alphabet (upper right), lists (lower left) and sentences (lower right).









Mi papa va a comprar un arbolito de navidad
My father is going to buy a Christmas tree

Table 1: Number of children in each stage by month

	Drawing/ Squiggles	Name only	Letters/Numbers Random	Letters/Numbers In order	Lists/ Words	Sentences	
AUG							
ES	0	0	0	3	3	4	=10
SS	3	1	7	5	0	0	=16
OCT							
ES	0	0	0	0	3	6	=9*
SS	1	2	7	4	0	2	=16
DEC							
ES	0	0	0	0	0	9	=9
SS	0	0	7	1	5	3	=16
JUNE							
ES	0	0	0	0	0	9	=9
SS	0	0	0	2	12		=14**

Note. ES = English speaking; SS = Spanish speaking; NSS = New Spanish speaking *One English speaking (ES) student left after the first quarter **Two Spanish speaking (SS) students left after the third quarter

making stage, with some illustrations (see Table I). By January, one English speaking child had written a list in Spanish, and one Spanish speaking child had written a list in English and Spanish. However, no other instances of children writing in their second language occurred during the school year.

Another difference between the native English and Spanish speakers was that from the beginning the English speakers accurately read their journal entries aloud, while the Spanish speakers tended to write letters and read sentences. The majority of the Spanish speaking children also read their journals aloud in very soft voices, while the English speaking children spoke with more confidence. Perhaps the Spanish speakers had had fewer opportunities to read aloud previously. By March, however, all of the children read loudly enough for the whole class to hear.

Peer Interaction

One of the most important findings to date, however, has not come from the analyses of the journals, but rather from the researchers' classroom observations and informal interviews. It appears that the children were learning from each other. One observer found that children listened to each other when journals were read aloud. Children also leaned over and watched while neighbors were writing. This is consistent with a finding by Dyson (1989) that over time individual children will begin to incorporate into their own approach the composing activity first made visible by others in their journals.

We observed several specific instances of this in our study. One occured with two Spanish speaking children who had been watching and listening to their peers for 12 weeks, but were drawing or writing letters only. One day, during journal writing, both whispered "Mira, mira" (look, look) to the most fluent Spanish speaker at their table, showing off proudly that they had both written down all the names of their tablemates.

On another occasion, the graduate assistant asked a native English speaking child, "Who do you think is a good writer in the class?" The child answered that John was, "because he can write in Spanish. I saw his journal and I thought, maybe I can do that too!" Events like these can only occur in a classroom where children are free to interact with each other and to make their own writing choices, where they are allowed ownership of their work.

Discussion

This paper has posed four questions. The first asked whether there were patterns that these first grade children would exhibit in journal writing, whether it was in English or in Spanish. It can easily be seen from Table I that indeed there were such identifiable patterns. However, although there was a steady progression among all the children towards sentence (or message) making, it is important to note that individual children did not pass through each of the above mentioned stages, while others moved back and forth. This finding is congruent with the work of Dyson (1985) and Sulzby (1986) for monolingual students, and Edelsky (1986) and Hudelson (1989) for bilingual students. For example, John (a native English speaker) wrote this sentence on the first day of school:

MUNDUA
I SURTID FRSGRAD

IWUS VERE
IKSIDID
(Monday, I started first grade I was very excited)

The majority of John's entries for the next month, however, were word lists (shapes, places, opposites). In October he began to write sentences every day, describing his school day and week-end activities. This continued until February when he went back to list making, however writing the months of the year and the days of the week in Spanish. He, like many other children reverted to "simpler forms" when attempting advanced writing tasks, in this case, writing in his second language.

The second question asked whether there was a difference in these patterns between the Spanish and English speakers, when they were writing in their native languages. No differences were found. Children began at different stages, however, and it appeared that more Spanish speaking children began the first grade at the play, scribbling and drawing stage, while more of the English speaking children began at the word list stage (see Table I). This difference may be attributed to whether the children had had exposure to writing in kindergarten and/or at pre-school. In fact, most of the Spanish speaking children's kindergarten experience was focused on oral language (English) and not on writing skills.

The third question asked at what point the children might begin writing in their second language in their journals. During the observation period, only two children actively began to write in the new language. One English speaking boy (John) wrote days and months in Spanish. As indicated other children observed this and indicated a desire to do the same, but didn't. During January one child whose first language was Spanish wrote colors in both Spanish and English. These two examples were the only occurrences of carry over in journal writing, although all children had the opportunity to write in Spanish and English during their afternoon sessions in other curriculum areas.

Finally, the fourth question considered the impact of social interaction on children's writing. There were clear indications that such interaction made a substantial difference. As children at further stages on the writing continuum (e.g. list making) were observed, that appeared to cause children at the drawing stages to reach for those higher levels. In addition, children who saw their peers writing in a second language were encouraged to do so themselves.

Conclusion

In classrooms where the opportunity for authentic and meaningful writing takes place, such as in the one studied here, children will grow in their knowledge of print as they become part of our literate society. The patterns and interactions we have observed are just the beginning. As we watch these children over the next few years we expect to learn more about the natural acquisition of print and how it is used in meaningful contexts. We also expect to see natural journeys between writing in English and in Spanish, of which we saw little this year.

Edelsky (1989) found in her study of 27 children that even when program philosophies encouraged whole language approaches, "actual practice was considerably different" (p. 167). We hope that classrooms such as the one we are

studying will become the norm, where children are allowed to develop interactive literacy skills in a natural and supportive environment.

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